

3-1-2010

## Academics, Research, Medical School Aspirations and How it All Came Together

Michael White  
*Lake Forest College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://publications.lakeforest.edu/eukaryon>

### Disclaimer:

Eukaryon is published by students at Lake Forest College, who are solely responsible for its content. The views expressed in Eukaryon do not necessarily reflect those of the College. Articles published within Eukaryon should not be cited in bibliographies. Material contained herein should be treated as personal communication and should be cited as such only with the consent of the author.

---

This Alumni in Focus is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Lake Forest College Publications. It has been accepted for inclusion in Eukaryon by an authorized editor of Lake Forest College Publications. For more information, please contact [levinson@lakeforest.edu](mailto:levinson@lakeforest.edu).

## Academics, Research, Medical School Aspirations and How it All Came Together

### Michael White

Department of Biology  
Lake Forest College  
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045



I always viewed college as the stepping stone to the rest of my life, and several years later, I never forget how Lake Forest College opened the doors to endless opportunity. I am currently a second year medical student at the University at Buffalo and took a year off after graduating from college to continue my Parkinson's disease research. In medical school, everyone has their own way of getting here, and I have not met any two people who had the same experiences. It was those experiences that defined and prepared each of us for a career in medicine.

During my sophomore year, I developed a strong interest in science during the Cell and Molecular Biology course with Dr. DebBurman. I was exposed to numerous aspects of the field, including basic concepts as well as current research and laboratory approaches. As I progressed through college, this fundamental interest and motivation continued to grow and led to an introductory summer research fellowship at Rosalind Franklin University and reached a pinnacle with Parkinson's disease research at Lake Forest with my teacher and mentor, Dr. DebBurman. While studying neurodegeneration and performing Parkinson's disease research, I shadowed a prominent neurosurgeon at Northwestern University Medical School to explore the clinical aspect of neuroscience. I awoke at 4 a.m. and commuted weekly to Chicago to shadow, because I was fascinated with neurosurgery and applied my foundation in neuroscience to clinical practice. My academic and extracurricular experiences created or reinforced academic interests, motivating me to seek more opportunities and most importantly, led me to realize that I was profoundly interested in and well suited for an academic medicine career.

My last year in college was, in all honesty, the best year of my life. I dedicated 50% of my course work to thesis research, traveled to local and national science meetings, continued to shadow in neurosurgery, and volunteered in an Alzheimer's care facility. Taking a year off between college and medical school was always the plan, and my focus remained on academics and my thesis research. Competitive scores are critical for acceptance to an allopathic (M.D.) medical school, and having my senior

grades was an important depiction of my academic abilities and maturity. I took the MCAT in the summer and swore it would be a one shot event. In the spring of my senior year, I formulated a plan for my time off with the help of my mentor Dr. DebBurman.

I learned that absolutely anything is possible at Lake Forest College, including spending a post-baccalaureate year continuing my Parkinson's research with Dr. DebBurman while simultaneously applying to medical school. I wanted to continue and publish my research, mentor the upcoming thesis students in our lab, and have a unique and significant experience that also allowed me to travel for medical school interviews. Everything fell perfectly into place, because Dr. DebBurman was taking a sabbatical during my year off, and we recently received NIH funding. I learned over the years that when events, interests, and motivations fall perfectly into place, you should go with it and never think twice. I love the Lake Forest College community and specifically the research community and knew that this was the perfect experience for me.

In our lab, we had two thesis students, several Richter Scholar summer researchers, and other undergraduates that I helped train in addition to managing most of the components that make a research lab function. I was also extremely fortunate to be the only undergraduate accepted to attend a prestigious Gordon Conference on neurodegeneration at Oxford, U.K. This conference was an incredible academic and social experience, because all the attendees were critical contributors to our understanding of neuroscience and modern medicine. Furthermore, I wrote the first draft of a primary research article for publication that I was the first author on. My relationships continued to mature with my professors, who I had known for several years at this point as well. There were not many downsides to time off, except that my relationships with many of my friends changed, because everyone is off following his or her own path, and this is facilitated by time slowing down a bit without heavy course work.

In the end, there is no set path to medical school, and it was my individual experiences, motivation, and academic interests that led me to taking a year off and eventually to a career in medicine. A year off served as a final collegiate experience and time to complete a long and challenging application process. If you follow those interests that begin in the classroom and with your teachers, everything else will blossom from it, and all you have to do is follow the path. That is exactly what I did, and I could not be more content. I am currently pursuing a career in neurosurgery.

*Note: Eukaryon is published by students at Lake Forest College, who are solely responsible for its content. The views expressed in Eukaryon do not necessarily reflect those of the College. Articles published within Eukaryon should not be cited in bibliographies. Material contained herein should be treated as personal communication and should be cited as such only with the consent of the author.*